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ABSTRACT

In the late 1980s, when few Canadian citizens had Internet access, federal departments and agencies in Canada were already preparing for the future by putting information and documentation online. This paper outlines several government-sponsored programs--SchoolNet, the Canadian Investment Fund, Community Access Program, Canada Foundation for Innovation, VolNet, and the Smart Communities Program--that have ensured that Canadians, their communities, their libraries and their schools have quick access to the Internet. Discussion then moves to efforts to promote e-democracy, including Internet sites that feature a wide variety of material to keep voters informed, email addresses for voters to contact elected officials, campaigning over the Internet, and electronic voting. The paper then focuses on the impact of e-government and e-democracy on libraries, and specifically on how e-government and e-democracy are affecting the Canadian Library of Parliament. The Intraparl internal web site, online catalogs, electronic news monitoring service (PARLMedia), the LEGISinfo research tool, and the electronic document series known as TIPS are each described briefly, followed by projections for the future. (AEF)

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E-democracy and E-government: how will these affect libraries?
The Case of Canada

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Almost three years ago, in October 1999, the federal government made a commitment in its Speech from the Throne to connect Canadians to the Internet and become a world leader in e-government:

> By 2004, our goal is to be known around the world as the government most connected to its citizens, with Canadians able to access all government information and services on-line at the time and place of their choosing.

This is a challenging goal; but Canada has a long record of achievement in exploring the possibilities of e-government. In the late 1980s, when few Canadian citizens had Internet access, federal departments and agencies in Canada were already preparing for the future by putting information and documentation on-line. During the following decade, Internet access became widespread in Canada, largely as a result of government-sponsored programs.

One of the first of these programs was **SchoolNet**, a co-operative initiative of Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments. SchoolNet was launched in 1993 with the aim of interconnecting all libraries and public and secondary schools in Canada through providing them with Internet access. As a result, over 3,000 libraries and more than 14,000 schools have been connected to the Internet. In addition, over 250,000 computers have been distributed to schools and libraries across Canada. For some

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sites located in rural or remote regions, where direct connection to the Internet is not readily available, satellite technology has been used as an alternative link.

In 1994, the federal government introduced the **Canadian Investment Fund**, which helped leading-edge technology firms to obtain long-term capital for projects to improve the diffusion of technology and innovation, with the aim of creating a Canadian technology network. At the same time, the government strengthened research and development by encouraging technology partnerships between Canadian universities, research institutions and the private sector.

Also in 1994, the Government of Canada launched its **Community Access Program**, which aims to provide Canadians with affordable public access to the Internet and the skills they need to use it effectively. Through this program, libraries, schools and community centres act as "on-ramps" to the Information Highway, and provide computer skills and training. The program has established Internet access sites in more than 4,000 rural and remote communities, and is being expanded to include 5,000 urban centres.

A few years later, the Canadian government launched the **Canada Foundation for Innovation**. The foundation, created in 1997, invests in the development of information and knowledge infrastructure that can be accessible to all Canadians. This initiative is further intensifying the construction of communication linkages and research databases, and the development of high-speed computing. At the same time, it is helping to promote jobs and economic growth, to support laboratories and field stations, and to fund research in the fields of health and the environment.

Another very successful Canadian government program was **VolNet**, the Voluntary Sector Network Support Program, created in 1998. VolNet was established to "expand the technological capacity of the voluntary sector" and to "enhance the capacity of voluntary organizations." Through this initiative, the federal government allocated 20 million dollars over four years to provide 10,000 voluntary organizations with access to computer equipment, Internet connectivity and network support, while at the same time providing training to more than 17,000 staff and volunteers.

More recently, the federal government has created the **Smart Communities Program**, which aims to help Canada become a world leader in the development and use of information and communication technologies for economic, social and cultural development. The program's goal is to help Canadians realize the opportunities and benefits that information and communication technologies can offer to communities, organizations and families.

These federal government programs, along with several more, have ensured that Canadians, their communities, their libraries and their schools have quick access to the Information Highway. Moreover, they have been a key factor in Canada's effort to close the digital divide, particularly in rural, remote, Northern, and Aboriginal communities. They have enhanced Canadians' access to government services, thus promoting greater interaction between the government and its citizens. Furthermore, the feedback received from citizens through on-line connections helps the federal government to improve its efficiency in addressing the demands and priorities of Canadians.

As a result, Canada has now achieved a large part of the goal mentioned a few minutes ago – that of being "known around the world as the government most connected to its citizens." In a report recently released by an independent company, Canada placed first among 23 countries for its leadership in e-government, as measured by citizens' ability to access a wide variety of government services on-line. In addition, a recent national survey found that 81% of Canadians consider that the government's use of information technology is a move in the right direction.

In the context of e-democracy, the Internet has also been a political asset to elected officials in government. Canadian Prime Ministers, Senators, Members of the House of the Commons, provincial leaders, and municipal mayors have used the Internet to access information and share it with the general public. For example, the Prime Minister of Canada's Internet site provides users with insight into government initiatives, Cabinet ministers' proposals and youth-related issues. It includes information relating to all the members within the Prime Minister's party, and gives an e-mail address for contacting the Prime Minister.

All the national political parties have also established Internet sites to help keep voters interested and informed. These sites promote the party leaders, and comment on national issues in the media and government legislation in the House of Commons They also include in-depth information on constitutional party matters, policies, and recent surveys, and generally help to keep party members connected. The Canadian Alliance Internet site, for example, provides voters with links to their party members' personal Internet sites and e-mail accounts. In this way, voters can contact any member of the Canadian Alliance party by e-mail.

Some Senators and Members of the House of Commons have also created Internet sites that feature a wide variety of material, such as updates on current legislation, items relating to specific linguistic and political needs of their constituents, personal biographies, and contact information. Senators and Members of the House of Commons have an e-mail account that constituents and other citizens can use to pose questions and make requests. Some MPs and a few Senators use the Internet very actively to maintain close ties with their constituents. They have created sites that provide insight into current government bills, legislation, and areas of their own personal and political interest. Some sites enable interested parties to access detailed information relating to federally sponsored work in an MP's constituency.

For provincial leaders, too, the Internet is an effective means of creating a rapport with voters. In his recent leadership campaign, the current Premier of Ontario used his personal Internet site to attract voters within his party and constituency, supply voters with campaign information, and provide commentary on provincial issues. Likewise, the Leader of the Opposition in Ontario has used his Internet site to alert voters to information about the riding, elected party members, current provincial issues, charities, and membership registration within the party. The Premier of Alberta has created a user-friendly Internet site that gives voters rapid access to information about issues such as health, education and security, and allows them to view recent news articles relating to the province of Alberta.

At the municipal level in Canada, mayors and councillors are also using the Internet to promote their campaigns and keep residents informed of party policies and local issues. The Mayor of Montreal and leader of the Montreal Island Citizens' Union, for example, has used his Internet site effectively to distribute information relating to the elected councillors of the Citizens' Union, the Union's policies, and its vision for Montreal. Information about electoral districts, candidates' résumés, and municipal documents are available on-line, along with much other relevant material.

The City of Vancouver has taken a similar path. Its Mayor, who is also the leader of the Non-Partisan Association, has used the Internet to provide Vancouver residents with on-line information about council meetings, councillors' biographies, civic awards, schedules and agendas. The mayor's site has links to the City of Vancouver's web page and allows users to perform searches based on the Vancouver region.

The new technology of electronic voting is also becoming more widespread in Canada. The automated voting system made its debut in most Ottawa region municipalities in 1997. The municipalities of Saanich and Colwood in British Columbia, and Pointe Claire in Quebec, have likewise introduced

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automated voting in their municipal elections. The results are very positive. The voting process is faster; results are known as soon as the polls close; voter turnout has increased, due to the new systems' efficiency; fewer polling stations are required; and the cost of voting has diminished substantially.

Meanwhile, at the federal level, Members of Parliament have yet to decide on electronic voting. One of them, Reg Alcock, believes certain criteria will have to be met before MPs can accept the introduction of electronic voting at the federal level. In an editorial published earlier this year, Mr. Alcock stated:

> There must be a means of authenticating identity and there must be a secure channel for the transmission of the information. Once these conditions are met two important trends are enabled.
>
> First the ability to vote online will dramatically reduce the cost of voting. This in turn will allow more frequent use of referenda and will shift the balance of control from Parliament to citizens. Rather than voting once every four years, citizens will be able to express opinions more frequently. The impact will be greater accountability.
>
> Second...MPs will no longer have to be present to vote. This in turn will enhance the importance of their individual vote while reducing the importance of the place. The impact will be greater participation. (*Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Spring 2002, p. 2)

What is the role of the library?

The impact of e-government and e-democracy on libraries will be very significant. The effects will vary according to the type of library; but one common denominator for all libraries is direct and more rapid access to government information.

In academic and special libraries, electronic government information has allowed the option of collecting less printed government material, thus helping to relieve the pressure on storage space. The growing number of electronic periodicals in trade collections has had the same effect.

In school libraries, electronic government information has given students greater access to this kind of material, since collecting printed government publications is usually not a priority at these libraries. The same effect can be observed in public libraries.

All libraries will need to have staff who are trained in Internet use and familiar with on-line government information, in order to ensure efficient access for their clients and users. Staff must also be able to train clients how to find and retrieve on-line information.

With regard to the effects of electronic democracy on libraries, I have already mentioned that all Canada's major political parties maintain Internet sites that provide public access to their current policies and programs, lists of past representatives in each constituency, and information to attract new members and financial support. These sites are accessible and useful to all library customers.

In general, the availability of more government and political information on-line has decreased the number of reference requests for these documents. However, requests have increased for training on how better to access this information.

I would now like to focus specifically on how e-government and e-democracy in Canada are affecting the Library of Parliament – a library that is uniquely placed to serve the needs of government

in this electronic age. Over the last several years, the Library of Parliament has acquired and created an increasing number of electronic collections and resources. At the same time, the Library's key clients – federal Parliamentarians and their staff – have acquired the skills and equipment that allow them to make use of information technology. This, in turn, has encouraged the Library to introduce a range of new electronic information services for its users, and to maximize access to its electronic collections.

For instance, in our Parliament, we have set up Intraparl, an internal website providing a "Links and Database" site which combines access to a CD-ROM's server, commercial websites, as well as open sites in one location based on topics, subjects or document types that are tailored to the needs of Parliamentarians. All Senators, and Members of the House of Commons, and their staff have desktop access to dictionaries, newspapers, company profiles, trade statistics and census information, statutes and case laws, periodical indexes (some full-text), specific trade serial, other legislatures' web sites, publications of research and international organizations. Timely access is provided to all research and information publications of the library, in electronic format.

Like most, if not all, parliamentary libraries, the Library of Parliament offers its users a wide choice of **on-line catalogues**. Many of these have been customized to include links to electronic books and documents, digitized tables of contents, digitized periodical articles, and other functions.

A popular feature of the Library of Parliament's electronic service applications is its **electronic news monitoring service (PARLMedia)**. This application allows parliamentarians and their staff to browse and search today's, yesterday's or the last three months' newspapers. Moreover, the news filtering system allows access to a selection of articles organized by subject and personal name for the last two years. In addition, a selection of archived scanned articles dating from 1962 to 1998 is searchable by Library Staff.

Another special service developed by the Library is **LEGISinfo**, a key research tool for finding information on legislation currently before Parliament. In addition to the text of the bill at various stages, LEGISinfo includes government press releases, backgrounders, legislative summaries, and important speeches by parliamentarians. It also provides electronic access to recent newspaper articles, a reading list, and other related web links for House of Commons and Senate government bills. This service offers easy, comprehensive access to legislative information and reduces time spent in researching it.

Also noteworthy is the Library's electronic document series known as **TIPS** – "Topical Information for Parliamentarians." These brief documents are designed to provide incisive snapshots of a variety of current issues. We have now a series of about 100 TIPS; each one provides a summary of a specific issue, along with direct links to related resources on the Internet, or in the electronic collections of the Library, or to documents produced by the Library's staff. All committees of the Senate and the House of Commons have established websites.

One interesting project related to electronic democracy has been initiated in the House of Commons with the aim of strengthening communications between MPs, constituents and interest groups. The Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities has launched a web site to help Canadians become more aware of, and involved in, the work of parliamentarians as members of the Sub-Committee. The web site was created by staff of the Library of Parliament. It will be monitored closely, and the findings may change the way in which parliamentary committees work in the future.

For the Library of Parliament – and for all libraries – the increasing reliance on electronic resources raises questions about how best to preserve such information. Evidently, there must be more focus on digital preservation. As electronic material is often less costly to store than printed documents, lack of resources may encourage some libraries to eliminate collections in printed format. Other libraries, however, will retain printed collections, due to uncertainties about the viability of the long-term

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preservation of digital materials. In the whole, I believe we will face the responsibility of preserving parliamentary and legislative materials in both print and electronic formats for the foreseeable future.

What about the future? The circulation of information by e-mail, the multiplication of web sites and the proliferation of material available on the Internet will continue to puzzle those in search of specific information. You have probably often heard people saying that they are submerged or bombarded by information. What will the next step be? I believe that people will become polluted by information, and I suspect that parliamentarians will be among the first groups to be affected by that kind of pollution.

In this situation, I suggest that libraries have a critical role to play and may be able to reclaim their central and historical role of bringing discipline and coherence to both current and historical/archival information management. They can achieve this, in part, by providing more customized information services to clients. We are already seeing the start of this trend in the private sector: in North America, television and cable companies are testing the market with customized information services to respond to individual needs.

Accordingly, in the sector of parliamentary library and research services, I anticipate the spreading growth of customized electronic information services, including the development of detailed individual profiles and the selective dissemination of material. Information managers and technicians will work together to ensure that information in library collections is meta-tagged, so that it can be retrieved and presented in ways that best meet the needs of specific users.

With this vision, we have moved a long way from the traditional concept of a library – a concept that was valid for many hundreds of years. Today, we are in an era of rapid change, the "knowledge era"; and as the renowned management theorist Peter Drucker has said, "knowledge changes incredibly fast and today's knowledge is tomorrow's ignorance." In times like these, libraries need to change too.

Specifically, libraries must change the skills they bring to their work. This will be a challenge, because of a key difference between skills and knowledge. Skills have historically changed very slowly, whereas knowledge is now changing more rapidly.

I believe that libraries can, and must, meet that challenge. Moreover, in special libraries such as parliamentary and legislative libraries, the librarians and the research analysts already have the expertise that enables them to convert the data stored in the library, into customized information as required by the parliamentarians. The capacity to bring these knowledge professionals together to work in partnership is, in my view, a key factor in providing parliamentarians with high-quality information services, both now and in the future.

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